

Memorandum to the board of Rotary International on the board's decision in June 2010 regarding its refusal to give Rotary International's support to the global ban on anti- personnel mines

The Rotary Clubs

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1) observe that

- in April 2010 the Council on Legislation approved resolution 10-69 by a great majority (334:171) and resolution 10-70 with a two-thirds majority (352:154).

2) with great satisfaction greeted the fact that

- in giving its resounding support to both of these resolutions, the Council on Legislation in effect requested the board of RI to openly declare Rotary International's support of the worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines so that human suffering caused by mines can be avoided in the world in future.

3) are dismayed that

- in its meeting in June 2010 the board decided not to follow the wishes of the great majority of delegates of the Council on Legislation in having Rotary International add its voice and support to the worldwide condemnation of anti-personnel mines.

4) in view of our Rotarian ethics deem it neither convincing nor plausible that

- the board posits the preservation of Rotary International's traditionally neutral position as justification for its decision not to add its voice and support to the worldwide condemnation of anti-personnel mines.

5) request the board

- to revise its decision of June 2010 and not to turn a blind eye on the following arguments:
 - a) Even decades after a particular conflict, anti-personnel mines claim lives and cause terrible injuries among the civilian population. Apart from the human suffering they cause, anti-personnel mines hinder and impede the social and economical development of a country scarred by war, long after the official cease-fire. In short, this means that anti-personnel mines impede the return to peace.

The preservation and promotion of peace in the world are among Rotary International's foremost aims. By refusing to add its weight to the worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines, the board is in effect abandoning this organization's humanitarian goals.

- b) In its decision in June 2010, the board recommends ‘the Rotary Club provide services for peace and humanitarian purposes’ in place of a declaration of support for the worldwide ban on mines. In this recommendation, the board has overlooked the fact that the worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines is the next logical and consistent step in offering humanitarian aid to the victims of mines.

An international law banning anti-personnel mines supported by all of the world’s states would bring an end to human suffering caused as a direct result of mines. The worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines is thus an integral part of Rotary International’s humanitarian purpose, just as providing help to the victims of mines is.

- c) The worldwide eradication of the polio virus – which leads to poliomyelitis or infantile paralysis – has been one of Rotary International’s top priorities for more than two decades. The board should consider the fact that in over 70 countries in the world that are blighted by mines, many children protected by Rotary International from the polio virus end up losing their lives or limbs to anti-personnel mines.

The logical conclusion to be drawn from this fact can only be that Rotary International should compliment its successful polio project by adding its voice to the worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines.

- d) The Ottawa Treaty – which has prohibited the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines under international law since 1997 – has been signed to date by 170 states and has been ratified by 156. Several important countries, which are home to the majority of board members, unfortunately have yet to sign.

Rotary International is a non-governmental organization. The members of the board are thus independent from the political decision-making of their home countries. When it comes to the question of the worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines, they are not obliged to adopt the same stance as the policy-makers in their respective home countries.

In fact, as the CoL delegates’ overwhelming backing of resolutions 10-69 and 10-70 shows, the majority of Rotarians from around the globe expect that board members to uphold Rotary International’s humanitarian goals and, by openly declaring its support for a worldwide ban on mines, set an example worth following for those countries that still do not support the ban on mines and the Treaty of Ottawa.

- e) The board justifies its refusal to declare Rotary International’s open support for the worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines with the neutral position that the organization traditionally adopts.

Citing neutrality in relation to the ban on mines lacks plausibility. The International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, whose strict neutrality is both exemplary and indisputable, is not only one of the advocates of the ban on anti-personnel mines but played a leading role in bringing the Treaty of Ottawa forward.

- f) When looking at the objectives of those who the board declines to side with or against, it soon becomes clear that neutrality on the issue of the ban on mines directly conflicts with one of Rotary's principal aims.

The faction advocating the ban on mines wants to prevent death and terrible injuries inflicted by anti-personnel mines on children and civilians all over the world and forever. The faction opposing the ban on mines do not want to prohibit the production, trade, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel mines despite being fully aware of the endless human suffering that comes as a result.

If, as an organization with a humanitarian mandate and a humanitarian sense of mission, Rotary International remains silent on the global ban on anti-personnel mines, its silence only serves to encourage the producers, dealers and users of anti-personnel mines in their activities; on the other hand, those individuals involved in clearing mines, helping victims of mines, as well as those offering donations to such causes will feel abandoned by Rotary International's silence in their efforts to end human suffering caused by mines from the world once and for all. It is for this reason that Rotary International's refusal to take a stand on the matter regrettably amounts to it offering its support to the opponents of the ban on mines.

The board should heed the fact that when people's basic rights, such as the right to life and health are at stake, it is, from an ethical and moral perspective, utterly improper and inexcusable to hide behind the myth of neutrality and remain irresolute. It is for this reason that as far as the ban on anti-personnel mines is concerned, Rotary International cannot and should not remain neutral.

- 6) are deeply concerned about Rotary International's reputation and urgently request that the board:**
- **overturn the decision it took in June 2010 regarding its refusal to comment on the global ban on anti-personnel mines and**
 - **announce that Rotary International openly recognizes and supports the global ban on anti-personnel mines.**